

Chair
Agriculture
Committees
Domestic Animal Welfare
Education
Energy and Telecommunications
Environmental Conservation
Health
Local Government
Women's Issues
Legislative Commission
on Rural Resources

**THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK**



**JEN METZGER
SENATOR, 42ND DISTRICT**

Albany Office:
Room 817
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247
(518) 455-2400 Office
(518) 426-6780 Fax

District Office:
90 North St., Ste. 205
Middletown, NY 10940
(845) 344-3311 Office
(845) 344-3328 Fax

Satellite Office:
59 N. Main St., Ste. 302
Liberty, NY 12754
(845) 292-0215 Office

metzger@nysenate.gov

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to you today to express our concerns regarding the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on New York's dairy industry and to request federal action. The dairy industry is the largest sector of New York's agricultural industry. The state is home to over 4,000 dairy farms and 335 dairy processing plants, ranging from major global companies to small, family-run operations. New York is the third largest producer of milk in the nation and the largest producer of yogurt, cottage cheese, and sour cream.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the industry was already facing a multi-year cycle of depressed prices and low profitability, causing farm bankruptcies. The situation is so dire that dairy farmers have one of the highest rates of suicide of any group in America. Now, with the widening economic impact of COVID-19, the dairy industry faces decreased demand from restaurants and food service vendors, disruptions in global trade, and school closures. Prices for milk have drastically declined, making it even harder for farms to break even. Many of the state's small family-operated dairy farms simply do not have the slack to weather this unprecedented crisis. Recently, cooperatives and processors have been directing farmers to dump milk to balance supply and demand and because workforce shortages have hurt processing capacity. At a time when millions of Americans are food insecure, we must do everything we can to help our nation's dairy farmers get through these turbulent times.

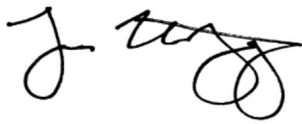
We request that the federal government use all available resources to assist the dairy industry during this unprecedented crisis. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) should immediately use the \$9.5 billion emergency fund included in the CARES Act to assist the dairy industry by developing a compensatory mechanism for farmers directed to dump milk. In addition, we urge USDA to use funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation to make dairy purchases. These purchases should be directed to emergency food service operations that have

seen demand skyrocket. Due to insufficient cold storage capabilities, USDA should initiate a voucher system to allow recipients to redeem products from their local stores. These systems already exist in New York and have been piloted by several food banks. In support of both dairy farmers and child nutrition, we also ask that you allow school lunch programs that are providing meals to children during school closures to purchase whole milk.

It is essential that the U.S. maintain its level of high-quality food production to ensure food security for the state and the nation. It is our hope that you will see the merit in these requests and advocate with all the force of your office to support the dairy industry.

Thank you for giving this request your timely consideration.

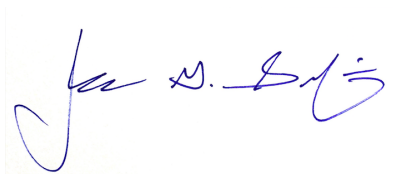
Sincerely,



Senator Jen Metzger
Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee



Senator Rachel May
Chair, Legislative Commission on
Rural Resources



Senator James Skoufis
Member, Senate Agriculture Committee



Senator Alessandri Biaggi
Member, Senate Agriculture Committee



Senator Velmanette Montgomery
Member, Senate Agriculture Committee



Senator Neil Breslin
Member, Legislative Commission on
Rural Resources

cc:

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader, United States Senate
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand, United States Senate
The Honorable John Katko, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Anthony Brindisi, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Antonio Delgado, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Sean Patrick Maloney, United States House of Representatives
Commissioner Richard Ball, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
President David Fisher, New York Farm Bureau